A

LETTER

From a Gentleman in the

COUNTRY,

To his Friends in

LONDON,

Upon the Subject of the

Penal Laws and Tests.

Quod tibi non vis fieri,
alteri non feceris.

Printed in the Year 1687.

Gentlemen,

I Wonder mightily at the News you ſend me that ſo many of the Town are averſe to the *Repeal* of the Penal Statutes; ſurely you mean the Clergy of the preſent Church, and thoſe that are Zealous for their Dignity and Power: For what part of the Kingdom has felt the Smart of them more, and at all times, and on all occaſions repreſented their miſcheif to the Trade, Peace, Plenty and Wealth of the Kingdom, ſo freely as the Town has always done? But you unfold the Riddle to me, when you tell me, *'tis for fear of Popery*, tho I own to you, I cannot comprehend it, any more then you do Tranſubſtantiation: For that we ſhould be afraid of Popery for the ſake of Liberty, and then afraid of it becauſe of Perſecution, ſeems to me abſurd, as it is, that Liberty ſhould be thought the high way to Perſecution. But becauſe they are upon their fears, pray let me tell you mine, and take them among the reſt in good part.

If the *Romaniſts* ſeek eaſe by Law, 'tis an Argument to me they deſire to turn good Countrymen, and take the Law for their Security, with the reſt

of their Neighbours; and a greater Complement they cannot put upon our Engliſh Conſtitution, nor give a better pledge of their deſires to be at peace with us. But if we are ſo Tenacious, as we will keep on foot the greateſt blemiſh of our Reformation, viz. our *Hanging, Quartering, Plunder, Baniſhing Laws*; Is it not turning them out of this quiet courſe, and telling them, if they will have eaſe, they muſt get it as they can, for we will never concede it? And pray tell me, if this be not thruſting them upon the methods we fear they will take, at the ſame time that we give that, for the reaſon why we do ſo.

If Law can ſecure us, which is the plea that is made, we may doubtleſs find an expedient in that which may repeal theſe, if the danger be not of Liberty it ſelf, but of our looſing it by them at laſt; for there is no michief the wit of man can invent, that the wit of man cannot avoid. But that which I confeſs makes me melancholy, is, that methinks we never made more haſte to be couſened; no not in the buſineſs of the *Declaration of Indulgence*, when in the name of Property that was actually damn'd, which, at leaſt, reprieved it; and the price the Church of *England* gave for it, *viz.* her promiſe of a legal eaſe, actually failed us: For inſtead of ſaving our ſelves from Popery, we are by theſe partialities provoking

voking it every day, and methinks, fooliſhly for our own ſafety; becauſe there can be no other end in doing ſo, then ſecuring that Party which calls it ſelf the *Church of England*, that is in her Conſtitution none of the beſt Friends to Property; for mens Liberties and Eſtates are by her Laws made forfeitable for Non-conformity to Her: And I Challenge the Records of all time ſince Popery got the Chair in *England*, to produce an eight part of the Laws, to ruin men for Conſcience that have been made ſince the other has been the national Religion, which is, I ſay, a ſcandal to the Reformation.

She ſays, ſhe is afraid of Popery becauſe of its Violence, and yet uſes Force to compel it; *Is not this reſiſting Popery with Popery?* which we call loving the Treaſon but hating the Traytor: She would have Power to Force or Deſtroy others, but they ſhould not have Power to Force or Deſtroy her, no not to ſave themſelves: Shift the hand never ſo often, this *Weapon* is ſtill the ſame. 'Twere happy therefore that all Parties were diſarm'd of this Sword, and that it were put where it ought only to be, in the Civil Magiſtrates hand, to terrifie Evil Doers, and cheriſh thoſe that do well, remembering St *Peter's* ſaying (in *Cornelius's* caſe) for an Example, *I perceive now of a truth that God is no reſpecter of Perſons, but*

thoſe

those that fear him, and work Righteousness in all Nations shall be accepted: Else what security does the Church of *England* give to the great body of her Dissenters, that she will not do what she fears from Popery, when she has a Prince of her own Religion upon the Throne, that has made so fair a Progress these last six and twenty Years in ruining Families, for non-conformity under Princes of an other Perswasion. Come, Interest will not lye, she fears Liberty, as much as Popery: Since those that want, and plead for the one, are an hundred times more in number then the Friends of the other, and all of her side, that Popery should not mount the Chair: So that she would get more then she would lose by the Repeal, if an equal desire to subject both Popish and Protestant Dissenters to her Power and Government be not the Principle she walks by in her present Aversion.

And to shew you that this is the case, and that her aversion to Popery is a sham to the Liberty desired, the Dissenters are of no use to her, while the penal Laws are on foot; for by them they are put in the power of a Prince of the Religion of the Church she fears; but the moment they are repealed, so far as concerns the preventing Popery to be national, the Dissenters are equally interested with the Church of *England* against it. But then here is

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the miſchief; This Liberty takes the Rod out of her hand; ſhe can no more *whip People into her Churches*, and ſhe perhaps may modeſtly ſuſpect her own vertue and ability to preach them thither.

In ſhort, if ſhe were in earneſt againſt Popery, more then in love with her own Power and Grandure; that is, if the World were not in the way, ſhe would rejoyce to deliver Men of her own Religion, that are ſo much more numerous then the Papiſts, that they might ballance againſt her fears of their prevailing: But to cry ſhe is for Liberty to Proteſtant Diſſenters, and make the demonſtration of it, her *keeping up the Laws that ruin them*, and then ſay it is for fear of the Religion the Prince owns, and yet force them into his hands by doing ſo, is, I muſt confeſs, ſomething incomprehenſible.

Beſides, properly and naturally ſpeaking, the Church of *England* is the People of *England* and when its apply'd to a Party, 'tis a Faction to the whole; and that Title has no more Truth in it, then 'tis ſence to ſay the Roman Catholick Church, which in Engliſh, is a particular Univerſal Church: And pray is there no room left to conſider this hard caſe of the Kingdom? I hope the civil Magiſtrate will, who is the ſupream Paſtor of this civil Church on Earth. Is ſhe then no more then a Party? no certainly.

And

And how great a one, a true Liberty of Conſcience would beſt tell us, and that is the true reaſon, and not Popery, that ſhe is tender in the point.

I conclude then, that whilſt thoſe of that Religion only deſire to be upon the Level with others; I mean upon *Native Rights*, the *Great Charter*, what we all of us call, our *Birth-right*, let us not refuſe it, leſt God ſuffer them to prevail to correct our partiality. There are Laws enough to puniſh Offenders againſt the State, if theſe were repealed, and not condemn People by *Anticipation*. *That Law which catches a Proteſtant, will catch a Popiſh Traytor, Riotor or ſeditious Perſon.* Again, let us reflect, that we have a Prince of Age, and more honour; the proſpect of three excellent Princes of the Proteſtant Religion, the paucity of the Papiſts, the number of the Enemies of their Communion, their unity in that averſion: what greater ſecurity can we have in the World? Since *Policy, Honour, Religion, Number, Unity, nay, Neceſſity too*, conſpire to make us ſafe; for all theſe are concerned in the means of our preſervation; unleſs our fears and our follies ſhould prevail: which I confeſs I apprehend moſt; for they muſt be deſerted of God, that forſake him and themſelves too; *who dare do a certain evil that a ſuppoſed good may come of it, contradict their own Principles, deny what they expect, ſow what they would*

would not reap, do to others what they would not that others should do to them: But there is a God in Heaven, and he is juſt: He will meet to us what we meaſure to one another, and his Judgment is inevitable. I therefore adviſe the Church of *England* to be as ready in her Chriſtian complyances as is poſſible: *Firſt*, becauſe it is impious to keep up deſtroying Laws for Religion, when her Saviour tells her upon this very Queſtion, *That he came not to deſtroy mens lives, but to ſave them.* *Secondly*, Becauſe by this ſhe will wipe off the Reproach ſhe throws by continuing them, upon her own Apologies for Liberty of Conſcience, when under the wheel of Power. *Thirdly*, Becauſe Liberty to the Papiſts by Law, is bringing them into the legal intereſt of the Kingdom, and will prevent the force, they may elſe be driven to, by being made and left deſperate: For 'its not to be thought they will willingly pay the reckoning in another Reign, if by any means they can prevent it; and keeping up the penal Laws, can be no ſecurity to the Church of *England* from ſuch Attempts, though they may provoke them upon Her. *Fourthly*, She hereby ſaves her diſſenters; and if it be really her inclination to do ſo, ſhe has no other way, and this unites them to her in affection and intereſt, if not in Worſhip. But if on the contrary ſhe perſiſts obſtinately

to refuse this national Pacifick; the Dissenters, I hope, will consider their honest Interest, *Conscience* and *Property*, and imbrace those opportunities to secure them, that God in his all-wise providence is pleased to yield them in this conjuncture. Thus Gentlemen, you have my thoughts upon your News, pray communicate them to our acquaintance, and believe that I am, Yours, &c.

POST-SCRIPT.

FOr the *Tests*, that *are* so much discoursed of, I shall only say, that 'tis an other mystery of the Times to me, how the Church of *England*, that was against the *Exclusion*, can be for them that were design'd for a *Preamble* to it; since in so doing, she is for that which was contrived to introduce the *Exclusion* she was so Zealously against. I confess I never understood her very well, and she grows more and more unintelligible; but this I know, that she must either be sorry for what she has done, or she did not know what she did. The first reflects upon her Loyalty, the last upon her understanding; and because I think that the least, and likeliest evil, I conclude, she is no infallible Guide upon the Question.

Another

Another thing you tell me, that gives great offence, is, His Majesties turning out Protestants, and putting in People of his Religion. This I conceive a fault, that the Church of *England* is only answerable for. Other Princes have been so unhappy as to Suffer *Tests* and *Marks* of distinction that have broken and disorder'd their Kingdoms, by depriving those of their Temporal comforts, that would not receive them; and This people esteemed a mighty grievance; and were frequent and elegant in their complaints about it. We have a King now, that would remove these *Marks* of distinction, and secure all men upon their native Right and Bottom, That all Parties might sit safely under their own Vine and under their own Fig-tree; so that now, *who is for Liberty?* becomes the *Test*. Are they then fit to be trusted that are out of his Interest, and against the Liberty he is for, and the Nation wants and craves? Or is it good sense, that He (who is mortal as well as other men) should leave the Power in those hands, that to his face shew their aversion to the Friends of his Communion tho he offers to maintain her still? She had the offer to keep them, upon that Principle that must heal and save the Kingdom, *Liberty of Conscience*; which shews, the King was willing to be served by her sons to chuse, if upon the same National Principle with himself:

himſelf: wherefore 'tis the Gentlemen of the Church of *England* that turn themſelves out of power, rather than endure Liberty of Conſcience to others; and ſhall this Vice be their Vertue? They muſt be heartily in love with Perſecution that can Sacrifice their Places to the upholding of penal Laws for Religion, and rather go out, then let others come in, or ſo much as live at their own Charges: A fine thing to ſuffer for. Their Anceſtors were Martyrs by penal Laws, but theſe for them. The cauſe is chang'd whatever they think, and I am afraid they are chang'd too for want of thinking. I Profeſs I pity them with all my Heart, and wiſh them more Wit, and better Conſciences againſt next time, if ever they have it; for theſe, if they will believe me, will hardly ever make ſo good a Bargain for them, as they have loſt by them. More of this, if you like it, next time, and till then, Adieu.

FINIS.